

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME, ~~DAWSON~~ INFIRMARY
(Superintendent's House)
900 King Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-686-D

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SC
10-CHAR,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20540
HABS No. SC-686-D

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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- Location: 900 King St., Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina. Located on the east side of Shuttlewood Avenue, just north of the Huger Street entrance gate, this building faces southwest toward King Street.
- Present Owner: The Board of Trustees of the William Enston Home.
- Present Occupants: Enston Home Superintendent Paul Helton and his family.
- Present Use: Superintendent's house.
- Significance: The William Enston Home is an early example of benevolent, philanthropic housing for the elderly. Funded by a bequest of 1859, the complex was built between 1884 and 1888, with additional structures put up in 1893, 1927, and 1933. With its neat rows of detached, double cottages, set amid spacious, landscaped grounds, the Home provides an unusual and well-preserved example of nineteenth-century picturesque, suburban planning concepts adapted to this type of institutional function. On the regional level, few buildings in the Romanesque Revival style were built in this part of South Carolina; the Enston Home provides one of the pre-eminent local examples.
- The Dawson Infirmary was built in 1933, following a gift that year from Harriet Dawson, to honor the memory of her brother, Dr. John L. Dawson.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1933. The 1932-35 *Yearbook* recorded that "in April 1933, the will of Miss Harriet E. Dawson left certain funds to the Trustees of The William Enston Home, to erect a small infirmary or hospital in memory of her brother, the late Dr. John L. Dawson, the terms of this bequest having been duly carried out, and the building so erected is serving a very good purpose."
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and Subsequent Uses: Originally the Dr. John L. Dawson Infirmary for residents of the Home, the building has served as the superintendent's home since

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- ~~DAWSON~~ INFIRMARY
(Superintendent's House)
HABS No. SC-686-D (Page 2)

the mid-1970s.

4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers: Not known.
5. Original Plans and Construction: No early images of the building have been located, though early textual references to it appear in the 1932-35 *Yearbook*, and the *Charleston News and Courier*, March 28, 1932 (neither of these, however, include descriptions).

The Infirmary is a one-and-one-half-story, L-plan building built of red brick with concrete trim. There is a sun porch at its south end, a projecting brick pavilion on its east side, and an entry porch on its west side.

6. Alterations and Additions: Following Hurricane Hugo in 1989, several modifications and repairs were carried out. All interiors were newly sheetrocked and painted, and new wall-to-wall carpeting was laid down. The old kitchen at the center of the building's northern end was converted to a dining room, while a new kitchen was installed in the room directly to the east of it. Other interior alterations dating from this time include: the addition of a wall now standing between the entry hall and back porch/stair area; the addition of counters to the north-end bathroom (adjacent to the kitchen); and the removal of a closet from the current kitchen and a pantry from the current dining room. Prior to the 1970s, when the building still functioned as an infirmary, the dining room area served as a nurse's station. Removed from it in 1989 were an electric buzzer system connected to the bedrooms, a built-in ironing board, and a large, built-in, glass medicine cabinet.

On the exterior, the west-side gable end was rebuilt. Its finial, formerly matching those on the west gables of the cottages, was replaced by a plain, stacked brick finial.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Infirmary is a one-and-one-half-story building standing by itself on the southeastern quadrant of the property. The brick walls and covered entry porch relate it to the cottages; other details linking it to the cottages are the west-side gable-end finial (now modified) and round-arched front window. Its relatively lower profile, south-end sun porch, and jerkinhead gable roof, however, show the influence of bungalow-style design. Brickwork here is less elaborate than it is on the cottages, and wall surfaces are more planar, less textural.

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- ~~DAWSON~~ INFIRMARY
(Superintendent's House)
HABS No. SC-686-D (Page 3)

2. Condition of Fabric: Condition is good throughout. In September 1989, Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston, causing extensive damage to the buildings of the Home. The Infirmary's interior and portions of its exterior were redone after this time, though some of these renovations were not in keeping with the historical integrity of the building.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: 68' x 43'.
2. Foundations: Red brick foundation with crawl space; partial basement in the northeast corner.
3. Walls: Red brick with white mortar. There is a corbelled brick beltcourse at floor level.
4. Structural System, Framing: Load-bearing common-bond (5:1) brick walls. The roof is wood framed.
5. Porches: The building has three porches. The west-side, front porch is similar to those found on the cottages -- i.e., a small, one-story, brick entry porch with battered walls and an open alcove on its southern end -- though smaller and without the balcony atop. Its round-arched, reinforced-concrete entryway is approached by five brick steps and supported by impost blocks. The porch floor is made of small, polychromed ceramic tiles arranged in a geometric pattern.

On the building's southern end is an enclosed, one-story sun porch, approached by six brick steps with low, concrete-capped, brick walls on either side. The porch is enclosed by an eighteen-light glass door -- with four-light, segmented-arch transom above and six lights on either side -- and four large, multiple-light, wood casement windows. All openings on this porch share impost blocks and are set beneath elliptical, reinforced-concrete arches -- except the door, whose arch is round. Inside, the ceiling is wood-framed, while the floor is of polychromed, geometrically-patterned ceramic tiles.

On the east side is an enclosed, projecting, one-story, brick pavilion. This gives access to the basement stairs and kitchen. It is entered through a wood and glass door (twelve lights over two wood panels), with fan-light transom and round concrete arch above.

6. Chimneys: One chimney on the north side, near the northeast corner of the building, flush with the exterior wall. The chimney has a corbelled cap.

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- ~~DAWSON~~-INFIRMARY
(Superintendent's House)
HABS No. SC-686-D (Page 4)

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and Doors: The west or front door is approached from the entry porch. It consists of twelve lights over two wood panels. Featured here is a five-light, flat-headed transom window and a screen door. Doors on the east and south porches are described above (section B.5.)
- b. Windows: A variety of windows is found here. Most, however, are one of two types: two-light, wood casement, swing windows, pivoting from the center, set beneath segmented, brick relieving arches (basement level); or pairs of two-over-two, double-hung sash windows with concrete lintels and sills (main floor). At the attic-level of the north and south sides are modified Palladian windows, their centers filled with wood-grilled vents. The south-end window is capped by a concrete arch and lintels, while its northern counterpart features header-bond brick lintels and arch. Finally, on the gable-end of the west side is a multiple-light, wood casement window set beneath a round concrete arch with ornamented springers. A lunette, beneath a brick relieving arch, is located at the attic level of this gable end.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, Covering: Jerkinhead gable roof with cross-gable wing projecting from the west side; covered with composition shingles. The sun porch on the south side has a flat roof covered with clay tiles.
- b. Cornice, Eaves: Corbelled brick cornice; metal gutters and downspouts. Eaves are shallow.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: From the front (west) porch one enters a hallway that runs the width of the building (west to east). North of this hall are the living and dining rooms and kitchen/pantry with adjacent bathroom. Intersecting this hall's south side is another hall. On either side of this hall are two bedrooms with a bathroom between them. The hallway terminates in the sunporch at the building's southern end.
2. Flooring: Most rooms in the house are floored with wall-to-wall carpeting. The kitchen floor is linoleum. The bathroom floors, like the porch floors, are of ceramic tiles arranged in geometric patterns.
3. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Walls are sheetrock, painted mauve, blue, and gray with 4"-high baseboard moldings and 1"-wide moldings located 12" from the ceilings. The interior moldings and textured-plaster ceilings are painted white. In the

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME --~~DAWSON~~ INFIRMARY
(Superintendent's House)
HABS No. SC-686-D (Page 5)

bathrooms, the lower halves of the walls are covered with black and white ceramic tiles.

4. Openings: Most interior door are single wood-panel type. Separating the two hallways are double French doors with ten lights on either side.
5. Decorative Features and Trim: A polished brass plaque on the south wall of the entry hall reads as follows:

This infirmary was given to The William Enston Home, By Miss Harriet E. Dawson, as a Memorial to her Brother, Dr. John L. Dawson, An Eminent and Beloved Physician, Who served this community for many years, Until his death on the 20th Day of February, 1917 . . . erected 1933.

6. Hardware: Most of the door hardware is plain brass. Wall socket and light switch covers are plastic.
7. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, Air Conditioning: The house is heated by a gas heating unit and cooled by a window-mounted air conditioner. Originally the building's heating system consisted of steam radiators heated by a furnace in the basement.
 - b. Lighting: The building is electrically lit. There are no fixtures of interest.
 - c. Plumbing: Bathrooms and kitchens all have hot and cold running water. All pipes are set within the walls.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

See overview (HABS No. SC-686).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the William Enston Home was undertaken during the summer of 1993 by the Washington Office of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. The principals involved were Robert J. Kapsch, HABS/HAER Division Chief, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS. The project was sponsored by the Historic Charleston Foundation, Lawrence Walker, Executive Director, and Jonathan H. Poston, Director of Preservation Programs. Additional support was provided by the Charleston Housing Authority, Don Cameron, Director, and the Enston Home Board of Trustees, Park Smith, Chairman. The measured

WILLIAM ENSTON HOME -- ~~DAWSON~~ INFIRMARY
(Superintendent's House)
HABS No. SC-686-D (Page 6)

drawings were executed under the direction of Frederick J. Lindstrom, HABS Staff Architect. The field recording was conducted by Project Supervisor Douglas S. Anderson and Architecture Technicians John M. Biggs and M. Douglas Godfrey. Under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Senior Historian, the historical report and written building surveys were produced by Keith L. Eggener, the 1993 Sally Kress Tompkins Fellow of the Society of Architectural Historians and HABS. Recognition should also go to Paul Helton, Superintendent of the William Enston Home, for his cooperation and assistance.